
A
S E R M O N
O N
SUNDAY SCHOOLS.

[PRICE ONE SHILLING.]



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COOPERATION OF HUMAN BENEVOLENCE
WITH THE DIVINE.

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S E R M O N

PREACHED IN

ST. PETER'S CHURCH, COLCHESTER,

On TUESDAY the 30th of JUNE, 1789,

FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE

SUNDAY SCHOOLS

ESTABLISHED IN THAT TOWN.

By YORICK SMYTHIES^K, M. A.

RECTOR OF ST. MARTIN'S, COLCHESTER; AND OF
LITTLE BENTLEY, IN ESSEX.

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE GOVERNORS, AND
FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE SAID CHARITY.

COLCHESTER:

PRINTED AND SOLD BY W. KEYMER.

SOLD ALSO BY G. G. J. AND J. ROBINSON, PATER-NOSTER-
ROW; ROBSON AND CLARKE, NEW-BOND-STREET, LON-
DON. W. CLACHAR, CHELMSFORD; AND J. SHAVE,
IPSWICH.

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A
S E R M O N.

I. CORINTHIANS III. 9.

WE ARE LABOURERS TOGETHER WITH
GOD.

TO a Congregation of Christians, composed of the benevolent institutors, the liberal and uniform supporters, and the occasional benefactors of Sunday Schools, assembled too for the humane and pious purpose of offering their annual tribute of Charity, the declaration of the Apostle must be obvious in its application. And though we presume but to imitate with conscious inferiority the bright examples of Prophets and Apostles, yet I trust the

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pious work in which we are engaged, in which we chearfully persevere, and in which by God's blessing we have already succeeded beyond our most ardent expectations, entitles us without the imputation of spiritual vanity to style ourselves "*Labourers together with God.*"—It will be the business, therefore, of this discourse, to consider, First, the grounds of our pretensions as the patrons of Sunday Schools to the character of being "*Labourers together with God.*" Secondly, to enforce the duty of persevering with united zeal and diligence in this pious work, which will lead to a summary exhortation to those who are more immediately connected with, and interested in the welfare of these establishments.

First then let us consider the grounds of our pretensions as the patrons of Sunday Schools, to the character of being "*Labourers together with God.*"

The precise sense in which St. Paul calls himself and the other Apostles, Labourers
together

together with God, is clear and obvious—they were engaged in preaching and propagating the Gospel of God. “*I have planted, saith he, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.*—Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one, and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour; for we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building.” But the words will evidently admit a more extended meaning and application. We may be said with the strictest propriety to labour together with God when we cooperate, in any way, with the designs of his Providence, and are instrumental, *voluntarily* instrumental, in the execution of them. And as all the Divine designs are ultimately good, and tend to produce the most universal happiness, we the Creatures of God and the eternal objects of his parental regard shall be more particularly entitled to this high distinction, when in imitation of Him, *our* designs are also good, and *our* actions productive of the happiness of mankind.

The virtuous and benevolent of every rank and condition who are engaged in a faithful discharge of the moral and social duties may in every point of view be justly deemed to be *Labourers with God*. For whatever is right and reasonable in itself, whatever is truly beneficial to our fellow creatures, we are sure must be God's will, and on that account may properly be called his work. His work it is because he requires it; because it is an imitation of his own work, and more particularly, because it is one principal means by which the intentions of his Providence towards us are carried into execution, and produce their full effect.

Every work of virtue is either good in itself or in its consequences, and is therefore indispensably required by the Author of all goodness. But works of mercy and charity stand the foremost in this heavenly class.—A remarkable and uniform preeminence is given to them in the Christian scheme of duty—they are emphatically styled

stiled good works, and they who are engaged in the constant exercise of them are said to be *rich* in good works. Moreover, the clearest preference is given to these in every case of competition with other duties.—Thus God has declared that he will have mercy and not sacrifice, that is, he prefers the former to the latter when they stand in competition.—And to mention nothing further, when our Saviour is giving a representation of the Day of Judgment, he singles out works of mercy and charity, and makes the proceedings of that great day turn upon an enquiry into them, not with a design to intimate a disregard of other duties, much less exclude them, but to shew the high dignity and peculiar excellence of these.

And what works of mercy and charity can we suppose more worthy of distinction, in the view of our all benevolent Creator, than those which we are now assembled to promote? For what human scheme for the reformation and happiness of the poor has ever been thought of in any degree comparable

rable to these benevolent Institutions, which are admirably calculated to supply the defects of other charitable establishments, and are clear of all popular objections?—Let us attend a moment to their rise, progress, and effect. Scarce five years have elapsed since the first idea of them, like a light from heaven, engaged the mind of a worthy individual *, to whose successful attempts pursued by those of other men of similar characters and dispositions, we are indebted for their present flourishing state in this kingdom.—How rapid has been their progress, and how extensive this labour of love, and what a glorious presage of future happiness to this country does the prospect of still greater success afford.—Behold *two hundred thousand* poor children, (the computed number of the whole collective body) many of whom it is to be feared ignorance and vice had lately *marked out for their own*, but who are now rescued, if it be not their *own* fault, from their destructive bondage; who from a state of savage ignorance and savage manners, are become

* Mr. Raikes, of Gloucester.

become, or at least have the means of becoming equally enlightened and reformed, and are so happily *training in the way in which they should go, that when they are old, it is to be presumed, they will not depart from it.* And if we take into our view the probable number of those parents and others who have collaterally profited by these institutions, we shall considerably extend and diversify the prospect: nor is it less pleasing to see men of all religious orders and distinctions cordially joining in support of these seminaries.

Great as this work is, it is wonderful by what easy and happy means it has been supported and accomplished through the zeal and activity of a few individuals, and the benevolence of the public.—Of the expediency, the utility, and the execution of this plan of education for the poor, so much has been published by men of the first literary abilities in this kingdom, and by none perhaps more ably and effectually than by some amongst ourselves, that it seems needless for me even to touch upon those points. I
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will only beg leave to say in confirmation of the remark I have just made respecting the great progress of these schools, that by a few hours of weekly instruction in reading, to about *six hundred children* (the present number in our own schools) the greatest part of whom were at first ignorant of their alphabet, there are now more than half that number who can read a plain sentence with tolerable ease. Nor has the progress been less remarkable, as far as we are able to judge of such progress, in their morals and manners. Such has been your work, and so justly are you entitled to the dignified appellation of being *Labourers together with God*. Little however will these pious labours avail, if we do not unite in them with perseverance.—A duty I am now to recommend and enforce.

In a cause like this, it is obvious to remark what bad effects must follow from any degree of that faintness or weariness in well doing, which is too often found, partially at least, to succeed the most vigorous and
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best directed efforts at the beginning. And the converse of this proposition holds equally true.—Were the *leading* members of these institutions to grow tired of their work, and relax in their attention—did the liberal Governors withhold their annual contributions—or refuse their occasional assistance—were the Teachers less vigilant or less mild—or the Children less diligent and orderly—or the parents less mindful of their children's attention to their several duties—or lastly, were you, the rest of you, my hearers, whom I beg leave to consider as part of a generous public, and who meet us in this sacred place for the avowed purpose of refreshing our plants with the annual shower of your bounty—were you to slacken that liberality, and so cease to become *fellow workers together with God*—were these, or any of these events to take place in any material degree, the spirit and energy of these hopeful and well concerted institutions would immediately relax, and such relaxation, operating like a partial obstruction in a complicated machine, would throw the whole system into disorder and confusion.

So essential to the regulation and support of these establishments is the uniform, and active, and mutual cooperation of the several members of them, whose respective assistance and endeavours are not less essential to the support of the common cause, than the several members and functions of the body natural are to the support of the whole man.

*“ The body is not one member but many : and
 “ the eye cannot say unto the hand I have no
 “ need of thee, nor again the head to the feet I
 “ have no need of you : nay much more those
 “ members of the body which seem to be more
 “ feeble are necessary ; that there should be no
 “ schism in the body, but that the members
 “ should have the same care one for another.”*

Let not then the least significant assistant in this work imagine, that the mite of his beneficence, or the most limited of his exertions are of no avail. Such united efforts, however small, will be secure of their effect here, and of their reward hereafter. Now if this be the general tendency and effect of *inferior* assistance, what a harvest may we not expect to reap from the cooperating and benevolent

benevolent perseverance of the principal supporters of these schools. And to animate and encourage, I had almost said to inspire us with unabating zeal in this good cause, may this single consideration suffice—that every *sincere* worker in it enjoys the sublime distinction of being a *labourer with the God of all perfection*.

Permit me now to offer a word of exhortation to those who are more immediately concerned in these pious establishments. If it be true, that these Schools bid fair to afford that sort of education for poor children which has the best tendency to make them “*wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil,*” by teaching them in the plainest and most effectual manner their duty to God, their neighbour, and themselves, “by enabling them to look into their testaments and see these words of truth and life with their own eyes, and to examine them with the understanding which God hath given them, *”—by bringing them

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* Dr. Forster's excellent Discourse on the Utility of Sunday Schools. Page 9.

to a regular attendance on public worship, and so keeping up in their minds a constant and lively sense of religion, and by training them in habits of honesty, industry, and contentment—If this, I say, be a fair representation of the general design of these establishments, who can be indifferent to their interests? Who, that has not a mite to bestow upon them, can refuse the warm wish of his heart for their success and prosperity? But that success and prosperity depends, and ever must depend, chiefly on the active zeal of the leading Governors, to whom—to one of whom more particularly (I anticipate your concurrence and approbation of the distinction) we shall be indebted for the institution and support of these Schools, as long as Charity shall be any thing more than a name. To you, therefore, my brethren, who stand foremost in this honourable list, we have little to offer but our most cordial thanks, prefiging from your past conduct, all that can be hoped in future. But though your energy be so essential to the welfare, perhaps to the very existence of this good work, yet
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it by no means renders the concurrence and assistance of others amongst us, useless or unnecessary.

To those liberal Contributors, therefore, who either from an implicit and satisfied confidence in the direction and management of their more active friends, or who from other motives are less attentive to the occasional calls of this Charity, I beg leave to observe that the more frequently they favour as well our *meetings as the schools themselves* with their attendance, the more vigorously will these seminaries flourish. And were I not persuaded that to men of their liberality no stronger inducement can be requisite than that of serving the community, of which they are so distinguished a part, I would try as well to remove all their scruples as to encourage their attention, by quoting the animating declaration of our blessed Lord—
 “ *Whosoever shall give to drink to one of these
 “ little ones a cup of cold water only in the
 “ name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he
 “ shall in no wise lose his reward.*”

To

To you the Teachers and the more immediate Guardians of these poor children, and to your laudable conduct in the discharge of your respective duties, I am happy to bear the most ample testimony. The present state of your schools is in full proof of your merits.—The undiminished, or rather the increased number of the children—Their progress in reading—Their orderly deportment in public worship, and in school—and the daily application for fresh admissions, are circumstances which mark the propriety of your conduct towards them. I cannot but impute your share of success, as well to the *mild* and *persuasive* measures which you have happily adopted, (and from which I trust you will never depart,) as to your due attention to the other duties of your schools. Having no reason therefore to doubt of your perseverance, we can have no doubt of your future success, as far, I mean, as success depends upon yourselves.

But after all that can be done by the liberality and assiduity of the Governors, and
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the conscientious vigilance of the Teachers, weak and fruitless will be the effect of their exertions, unless the Children perform their respective duties with diligence and care. It is your parts therefore, my good Children, to be as ready to hear and to learn, as your Teachers can be to communicate and instruct—to listen with attention to their admonitions, and submit cheerfully to their orders and directions—to be regular in your attendance as well at public worship as at your respective schools, and to behave [with decency, quietness and good order in both. I do not mean that many of you have been, or fear that you will be, inattentive to these duties. In the progress of my discourse I have said as much in your favour, but not more, than I think the greater part of you deserve. I have little more to add than to exhort you to go on with more and more diligence in the practice of these and all other your duties, remembering always that to be *good*—that is to love God and to keep his commandments, is to make yourselves happy both in this world and in that which is to come—

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remembering too, how much you all owe, under God's providence, to the goodness and generosity of the Benefactors to your Schools, for the care they have taken to keep you from the paths of vice, and *lead you in the way everlasting.*

After what has been said, or rather after what has been *done* for these poor children, there can be little need, one should think, of any exhortation to their parents. Parents are seldom *really* indifferent to the interests of their children, but they are too often either mistaken in the *means* of promoting their interests, or not sufficiently attentive in the *use* of them.

Did you, the parents of these poor children seriously consider how much it is in your power to further the views of this institution, by your instruction, admonition, and example, you might be the most useful *fellow labourers* amongst us. On the contrary, should any of you discourage or check your children, in any degree, in their regular attendance

attendance at these schools, or in the performance of the duties of them, you are answerable for the consequences ; answerable I mean to God, as far as such conduct may prevent the improvement of your children, in the knowledge or the practice of their duty to God. I wish not to be considered as reproving *any*, but rather as exhorting *all* of you.

I shall therefore conclude this short address to you, in the comprehensive advice of Moses to the Jewish Parent.—“ *These words, which I command thee this day, shall first be writeen in thine own heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.*”—Happy are the Children who are in such a case, and blessed are the Parents, who thus lead them to the favour of their great and common Parent—to their Lord and their God.

As to the present call upon the benevolence of you *all*, who are ever as ready to
distribute

distribute to the necessities of poor Children, as we are to *communicate* their wants to you, it is needless for me to urge a single motive. It is enough for you to know that we are pleading the cause of Charity—of a Charity most extensive in its nature, easy its execution, and most benevolent in its design—of a Charity, peculiarly your own, instituted and hitherto liberally supported by yourselves—of a Charity which is daily contributing it's proportion to “*fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*”

Finally, therefore, my beloved brethren, having all of us the distinguished honour of being in this and every other good work, *Labourers together with God, let us as it is meet, right, and our bounden duty, be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour will not be in vain in the Lord.*

Now to God, the Father, &c.

7 JUL 66

F I N I S.

Lately published,

AND MAY BE HAD OF

W. KEYMER, BOOKSELLER, COLCHESTER.

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